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Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/189, provides an update on actions taken by Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups in advancing the implementation of sustainable development goals and targets, including through partnerships for sustainable development.

The international community is currently tackling multiple challenges arising from the food and energy crises and climate change. These challenges, which are interlinked, adversely affect the most vulnerable populations and impede progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore necessary to act in an integrated and coordinated manner at all levels in order to alleviate the impact of these crises. It is also important to continue on the overall path of sustainable development through integrating the principles of sustainable development in all development strategies.

The present report provides an update on the activities of Governments and other stakeholders in this field. Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups should stay on track in implementing these goals, while aiming for accelerated progress.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 62/189, the General Assembly called for the effective implementation of the commitments, programmes and time-bound targets adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and for the fulfilment of the provisions relating to the means of implementation. as contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; reiterated that the Commission on Sustainable Development is the high-level body responsible for sustainable development within the United Nations system, which serves as a forum for the consideration of issues related to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and emphasized the importance of a consensus outcome and action-oriented policy sessions.

2. In this regard, the General Assembly invited the relevant specialized agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations funds and programmes, the Global Environment Facility, international and regional financial and trade institutions, the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa and other relevant bodies to actively participate, within their mandates, in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Assembly provided further guidance on the preparations for the sixteenth session of the Commission.

3. The present report has been prepared pursuant to resolution 62/189 in order to provide an update on progress made in implementing that resolution. It should be read in conjunction with other reports submitted under the agenda item on sustainable development, including those related to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, including the report on matters relating to the small island developing States and the development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations.

II. Overview of new and emerging challenges

4. Currently, the international community is tackling multiple challenges arising from the food and energy crises and climate change. These challenges, which are interlinked, adversely affect the most vulnerable populations and impede progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore necessary to act in an integrated and coordinated manner at all levels in order to alleviate the impact of these crises and to create global partnerships for their solution in both the short and long-term.

5. According to FAO, the number of hungry people increased by about 50 million in 2007 as a result of high food prices. A new study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pointed out that: higher food prices have cost a group of 33 net food-importing developing countries $2.3 billion since January 2007; in the same period, the effect of rising oil prices on 59 low-income net oil importers was $35.8 billion;

and annual food price inflation in 120 low-income and emerging market countries rose to 12 per cent at the end of March 2008 from 10 per cent three months earlier, while fuel prices accelerated to 9 per cent from 6.7 per cent over the same period. Poor countries that are highly dependent on food imports are particularly vulnerable to rising food prices. The share of household spending on food in emerging and developing economies typically exceeds 50 per cent.[1]

6. Two billion people living in drylands, areas that have the world's lowest per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and highest infant mortality, are especially vulnerable to further land degradation and declines in agricultural production. This has both physical and socio-economic consequences. Soil becomes less productive due to changes in its physical structure and biochemical composition. The World Bank estimates that annual income foregone in areas immediately affected by desertification amounts to approximately $42 billion each year at the global level. The indirect economic and social costs suffered outside affected areas, including the influx of "environmental refugees" and losses to national food production, may be much greater.

7. The report of the Secretary-General for the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development on agriculture (E/CN.17/2008/3) shows that domestic public expenditures by countries in their agricultural sectors have declined as a share of total public spending, from 11.3 per cent in 1980 to 6.7 per cent in 2002. Recent data indicate that for "agriculture-based countries" (14 in total, of which 12 are in sub-Saharan Africa), the share of public spending on agriculture amounted to about 4 per cent in 2004, down from 6.9 per cent in 1980. The share of spending on agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean has declined even further, perhaps to 2.5 per cent of total public expenditures in 2002 (from 8 per cent in 1980). The share of official development assistance (ODA) devoted to agriculture also fell from a high of about 18 per cent in 1979 to 3.5 per cent in 2004, while the volume of agricultural ODA fell from its high of about $8 billion in 1984 (in 2004 dollars) to $3.4 billion in 2004. At the same time, markets for value-added exports from developing countries have been restricted by high tariffs and low brand recognition in developed countries, and many developing country producers have been unable to meet the strict phytosanitary standards set in developed nations.

8. There is an urgent need, therefore, to help developing countries expand agricultural and food production, improve market access for agricultural products from developing countries and increase investment in agriculture, agribusiness and rural development from both public and private sources. In the report of the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development,[2] it is pointed out that agricultural productivity remained low in many countries and that agriculture was often sidelined even though it should be considered a crucial sector in national, regional and international efforts to reduce hunger and poverty and improve rural livelihoods. Insufficient investment in the agricultural sector from both public and private sources, domestic and international, was identified as a long-term constraint to increasing agricultural production. This has also been reaffirmed in the Declaration of the High-level conference on world food security: the challenges of climate change and bioenergy, adopted in Rome on 5 June 2008, which calls upon all donors and the organizations of the United Nations system to increase their

[1] See http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2008/NEW070108A.htm.

[2] See E/2008/29.

assistance for developing countries as an immediate measure, in particular those that are most negatively affected by food crisis, and to simultaneously start implementing medium and long-term measures in this regard.

9. In order to develop a comprehensive response, the organizations of the United Nations system have established a High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, which has outlined a comprehensive framework for action[3] in order to help address the current food crisis, including strengthening assistance to smallholder farmers in the developing world, who are among the most vulnerable, through close partnerships at all levels by all stakeholders. The Task Force also pointed out that the current food crisis should be looked upon as an important chance for promoting agricultural and rural development in many low income food-deficit countries, led by the quick establishment of an enabling policy environment and a set of supportive measures.

10. Along with measures to tackle the food crisis, there should be action to address the negative impact of energy prices, which pose a heavy burden on the poor. Improving energy access for the 1.6 billion poor people without electricity and the 2.4 billion people lacking modern energy services for cooking and heating is crucial for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

11. Closely interlinked with the food and energy crises is climate change. Extreme weather events resulting from climate change in the form of prolonged droughts or severe floods are affecting water management and agricultural production, further increasing the costs of adaptation in developing countries.

12. The multiple challenges stemming from the food and energy crises and climate change have far-reaching economic, social and environmental implications and meeting these challenges will require a more integrated and balanced approach to economic, social and environmental policies tailored to each country's needs, more space for implementing counter-cyclical macroeconomic policies, greater international support for broader social protection schemes and more investment in environmental policies, multi-stakeholder dialogues, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation. It also requires mainstreaming the three pillars of sustainable development into national sustainable development strategies. As of February 2008, 82 countries have implemented development strategies, while an additional 16 countries have formulated, and will soon start implementing, them.

13. In many countries, Governments have applied the principles of sustainable development to the formulation of sector strategies as the current crises show the need for more investment in agriculture and rural development, together with prevention of land degradation, the development of locally relevant land tenure systems and the sustainable management of natural resources. Algeria, for example, has developed national plans for agricultural and rural development, to combat desertification and for forestation, the last two of which are essential components of its national sustainable development strategy.[4]

14. Gabon has established a national committee for food security and rural development and has enacted legislation for sustainable agriculture and investment in agriculture. In Tajikistan, the Government is ensuring food security and reducing

[3] See http://www.un.org/issues/food/taskforce/.

[4] See E/2008/29 in all instances when particular countries are mentioned.

poverty through the expansion and improvement of microcredits for agriculture, the rational use of available resources, increasing agricultural crops, the provision of high quality seeds to farmers, as well as mineral fertilizers and modernized equipment, and the modernization and rehabilitation of irrigation facilities.

15. Investing in agriculture has been recognized as a very important part of food security. Mexico, for example, is promoting the agricultural sector in a way that encourages a profitable and competitive performance, with long-term, sustainable development plans in social and economic areas, and is committed to the conservation of its natural resources.

16. Senegal has undertaken institutional (establishment of a high council for natural resources and environment), operational (establishment of a surveillance structure such as an ecological centre) and legal measures (adoption of a number of laws that regulate use of water and biodiversity) to combat desertification. Kenya has elaborated a 5-year programme through its "Vision 2030" to encourage sustainable management of its extensive drylands.

17. National economies depend upon the diversity of biological resources and the life-support functions and services they provide. Yet the rate of loss of biodiversity is greater today than at any time in the past. The irreversibility of species extinction and the loss of genetic strains, natural habitats and ecosystems through degradation and overexploitation compromise options for present and future generations. It is therefore vital to undertake environmental assessments in order to prevent the degradation and overexploitation of biodiversity.

18. In order to preserve biodiversity and sustainable forestry, some Governments have adopted innovative economic measures. In Lithuania, for example, land owners have been given grants to encourage and support sustainable land management. The increasing amount of territory of protected areas and forests and the growing number and areas of organic farms demonstrate that the measures have been effective. Forests currently amount to almost 33 per cent and protected areas total about 15 per cent of the territory of Lithuania. The Chinese Government has also implemented a number of major ecological projects, including the conversion of cultivated land into forest, the restoration of grazing land to grassland, the protection of natural forests and harnessing the energy of sandstorm sources.

III. Actions at the intergovernmental level

19. At the intergovernmental level, deliberations in the Economic and Social Council in 2008 focused on sustainable development challenges, including the state of the world economy and its implications for the achievement of the United Nations development goals. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its review session in 2008, focused its work on the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.

A. Economic and Social Council

20. At its 2008 substantive session, held in New York from 30 June to 27 July, the Economic and Social Council focused its second annual ministerial review on implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to

sustainable development. The first Development Cooperation Forum, held by the Council on 30 June, focused on making development cooperation more coherent and more effective.

21. During its thematic debate, the Council also discussed an integrated approach to rural development, which provided a follow-up to the ministerial declaration of 2003, taking into account new developments, including the global food crisis and the role of bioenergy. The Council adopted a ministerial declaration underlining the multiple challenges to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including financial instability and uncertainty, slowing global economic growth and rising food and fuel prices, as well as the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change.

22. The ministers, recognizing the increasing rate of deterioration of the global environment in many significant areas, the continued challenges of environmental protection and the serious implications for sustainable development, strongly stressed the need to address critical issues of long-term global sustainability, taking into account the Rio principles, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The ministers reaffirmed the importance of investing in infrastructure for rural development and agriculture, recognized the in-depth discussion at the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and looked forward to recommendations of the Commission at its seventeenth session, which will advance rural development. They also reiterated the urgency of accelerating progress on the implementation of the priorities for action in water, sanitation and human settlements, agreed upon at the thirteenth session of the Commission, through integrating water and sanitation strategies into national development plans.

B. Outcome of the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

23. The sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a review session, focused on identifying barriers, constraints, lessons learned and best practices in implementation in the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. Its outcome was a Chairman's summary, consisting of a thematic review and a high-level segment.[5] Participants carried out a broad-based and balanced review of the six thematic issues, while highlighting interlinkages among the issues that reflected the unique strength of the Commission in addressing both sectoral and cross-cutting issues.

24. Many countries pointed out that poverty eradication remains a global priority and an overarching objective of sustainable development which will not be achieved unless decisions on sustainable agriculture and rural development are implemented and efforts to combat drought and desertification are scaled up through changing production and consumption patterns and reducing deforestation and forest degradation.

25. Among the most often cited concerns was the food crisis. Many countries mentioned the deleterious effects on poor populations and the risk of a swift reversal of the progress made in reducing poverty and hunger. Agricultural productivity must

[5] See E/2008/29, para. 157.

be increased to meet the long-term rising trend in the demand for food. Investment in the sector needs to be enhanced. At the same time, agricultural practices must be adapted to accommodate better land and soil management. Effective means must be found so that scientific and technological advances may reach small farmers through improved extensive services, including e-extension. The paramount role of women in agricultural production must be better recognized and they must be involved in the development of measures to boost productivity and sustainability.

26. Climate change and adaptation to climate change in relation to agriculture were mentioned by many participants. Climate change is expected to affect water resources and to have a strong impact on drought and desertification. For some speakers it is the most urgent challenge faced by African countries, small island developing States and least developed countries, whose economies are dependent on activities affected by climate.

27. Many countries underscored the need for more financial resources, transfer of technology and know-how and capacity-building — the means of implementation — as the most crucial cross-cutting issue necessary for sustainable development. They called on the international community to fulfil its commitments in those areas, including those made in the Monterrey Consensus, pointing out that developing countries need more funding in adapting to the effects of climate change.

28. The use of food crops for producing biofuels has been a source of concern to many countries, some of which pointed out that biofuels can help overcome fossil fuel dependency and provide employment opportunities if their production meets sustainability criteria.

29. In discussions it was revealed that the onset of the food crisis was threatening gains made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Africa: it reduced the affordability of food for the poor and led to a diversion of budgetary resources from other priority needs. Regional trade integration could help by permitting the production of farm inputs at a scale economic for regional markets. At the international level, however, Africa continued to face constraints from the global trade system owing to lack of market access for African agricultural products.

30. During the review of the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action, concern was expressed at the slow rate of implementation. It was noted that, while the small island developing States themselves had made some progress at the national and regional levels in building institutional capacity for sustainable development, formulating strategies and action plans and carrying out policy reforms, many continued to encounter constraints impeding their progress towards sustainable development, including limited technical, financial and human resources. The need to reverse the downward trend in international financial flows to the small island developing States, including official development assistance, the need to improve terms of trade, facilitate the transfer of appropriate technology and strengthen capacity-building in support of their efforts to adapt to climate change were also highlighted.

31. Various aspects related to the subject of water and sanitation were addressed during the review of the relevant decisions adopted by the Commission at its thirteenth session, including the importance of global and national monitoring of the

sector at all levels; the need for reliable data supported by improved knowledge and research; transfer of technology; and capacity-building. The importance of water governance and a participatory approach to water and sanitation; the role of partnerships, including public-private partnerships; and the importance of strengthening water utilities to extend the provision of services were also emphasized. Many countries pointed to limited financial resources as the main constraint to the achievement of the goals in this sector.

32. During the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, some 1,000 participants attended learning centre courses and took part in partnerships fair activities, benefiting from the Commission's capacity-building activities. The large variety of intellectually stimulating side events and parallel events (over 100 such events were organized) enriched the programme of activities.[6] The panel discussions throughout the session and at the ministerial dialogue were also well attended, providing opportunities for sharing experiences on the ground, lessons learned and best practices. The dynamics of these dialogue sessions once again demonstrated the value of the Commission as the only truly intergovernmental forum that deals with the linkages among the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. As at all previous sessions, the participation of the major groups and partnerships provided added value to the work of the Commission. Delegations also expressed their satisfaction with the Commission's matrix, which was considered to be a useful way of organizing information and sharing good practices.

IV. Implementation by the United Nations system

33. As the official United Nations mechanism for follow-up to the water-related decisions reached at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals, UN-Water continued its work in all aspects related to water and sanitation in 2008, including the preparation of a status report on integrated water resources management and a water efficiency plan for the Commission's sixteenth session. UN-Water also launched a status report on integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans for efficient, equitable and sustainable development and management of the world's limited water resources and for coping with conflicting demands.

34. As a coordinator of the decade "Water for Life": 2005-2015, UN-Water continued working on the decade's central themes: scarcity, access to sanitation and health, water and gender, capacity-building, financing, valuation, integrated water resources management, environment and biodiversity, disaster prevention, food and agriculture. It also continued coordinating various activities for the International Year of Sanitation 2008.

35. The Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a Caribbean workshop on sanitation, "Integration of sanitation policies into national development plans in the Caribbean region", held in Kingston on 28 and 29 April 2008. The objective of the workshop was to contribute to the improvement of the well-being of the population in the region through the

[6] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd16/sideevents/highlights.pdf.

integration and development of sanitation policies into sustainable development strategies and to share best practices and identify solutions appropriate to the region.

36. As an inter-agency network to help ensure coherence in the multidisciplinary response of the United Nations system to decisions taken at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in the area of energy, UN-Energy has continued to serve as a gateway for sharing information, knowledge, experiences and good practices as well as initiatives in energy-related activities. Its work is organized around three clusters: energy access, energy efficiency and renewable energy. The renewable energy cluster has continued its work to prepare an informational guideline paper for bioenergy policymakers. The energy access cluster has been working on a publication entitled "Energy services for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals: progress, challenges and priority actions" which will be launched at the High-level event of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals on 25 September 2008.

37. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) lends its support to nuclear power programmes, covering all stages of the fuel cycle. As a member of the UN-Energy, IAEA demonstrates the analytical usefulness of its analysis and planning tools for energy-environment policy analysis. It provides information on the advantages of nuclear power, including with respect to actions to combat climate change.

38. In 2007, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), together with UNEP, launched the joint poverty-environment initiative in Nairobi. The initiative has provided both agencies with additional opportunities to promote the links between fighting poverty and protecting the environment. UNDP also launched its Millennium Development Goal Carbon Facility in June as an innovative way to harness the vast resources of the carbon market to bring long-term sustainable development to developing countries through an agreement with the banking and insurance company Fortis.

39. In September 2007, UNDP marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. UNDP will continue to play a key role in efforts to assist developing countries to meet their compliance targets under the Protocol. In November 2007, UNDP launched the *Human Development Report 2007* on the subject of climate change. The report noted that regions with the smallest carbon emissions will be the hardest hit by climate change and will have the most difficulty coping with its impact.

40. UNDP also launched a major initiative to mainstream climate change risk into its programmes to support Governments in "climate-proofing" their development plans and to help ensure that the interests of the most vulnerable countries and people are reflected in the climate change negotiations.

41. UNDP has taken a leading role in the preparation of the guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee on applying strategic environmental assessment at the national level. UNDP has also developed its capacity through the integrated drylands development programme, which resulted in the mainstreaming of drylands issues and priorities into national policies, development planning frameworks, poverty reduction strategies and budgetary systems in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States.

42. The work of UNDP in the area of biodiversity has supported capacity development, knowledge management, policy advice and advocacy efforts. Through global advocacy and analysis, the UNDP Biodiversity Global Programme has assisted developing countries and communities in influencing national and global policies, benefiting from knowledge on biodiversity, and advancing their sustainable development and poverty reduction goals. UNDP has also supported a significant amount of work related to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

43. The Convention on Biological Diversity has made significant contributions to the implementation of Agenda 21, specifically chapters 15 and 16. This progress has been driven by the strengths of the near universal membership to the Convention, a comprehensive and science-driven mandate and international financial support for national projects. At the ninth meeting of the Convention of the Parties in Bonn in May 2008, 64 countries announced their promotion of additional marine and terrestrial protected areas for the implementation of the three objectives of the Convention. The secretariat of the Convention will continue to work with partners in the United Nations system in the celebration of the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.

44. UNICEF continues its work on water and sanitation through the joint monitoring programme for drinking-water supply and sanitation, with special focus on providing safe sanitation coverage. UNICEF has also continued with its "WASH1in school", initiative to ensure that children have access to safe water and clean, separate sanitation facilities in primary schools.

45. The Conference of the Parties has called for a special high-level event on the eve of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in 2010. It is also expected that, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Nagoya in 2010, the Parties to the Convention will adopt not only targets for the reduction of the rate of biodiversity loss beyond 2010, but also landmark international regimes on access to genetic resources, the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from their use, and liability and redress under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. A report on the economic value of biodiversity is being prepared for that event.

46. The United Nations World Tourism Organization, working to improve the contribution of tourism to the sustainable development goals, has published and circulated guidebooks on the application of indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations. A number of capacity-building workshops for their practical application have been held in several countries. As the tourism sector of developing countries and small island developing States is particularly vulnerable to the direct impacts of climate change, the Organization is investing in scientific research, capacity-building and awareness-raising efforts, in cooperation with other international, national and private sector stakeholders.

47. Since 2002, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has introduced a range of initiatives, including the environmental partnership proposals on the management of ballast water (GloBallast), the Marine Electronic Highway project for the Malacca and Singapore Straits and three new initiatives proposed by the organization Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia. It has also adopted a high-level action plan and priorities, with the aim of enhancing maritime safety and protecting the marine environment from pollution, thereby ensuring that the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development are continuously pursued.

48. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has placed increasing emphasis on addressing the global impact of aircraft engine emissions. To that end, it has established the Group on International Aviation and Climate Change and provided information on ICAO activities and aviation emissions. ICAO is participating in the "greening of the United Nations" and, to that end, has launched the ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator for use in carbon-offsetting programmes. The calculator is an internationally approved impartial web-based tool to estimate the amount of carbon dioxide emissions from a given flight.

49. The United Nations University has continued to contribute to education for sustainable development through the regional centres of expertise initiative launched in 2004 as part of the University's response to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The centres, in 55 locations around the world, bring together representatives of institutions of higher education, civil society, governmental and business organizations and non-governmental organizations seeking to translate global goals of the decade into local realities. In November 2007, the University's Institute of Advanced Studies launched a new initiative, Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network (ProSPER.Net), with 18 universities in the Asia-Pacific region. The initiative promotes activities in the areas of curriculum development, public policy and sustainable development, integration of sustainable development in business school curricula and training on sustainable development for educators and researchers.

V. Regional activities

50. The United Nations regional commissions and offices, regional development banks and other regional organizations continue their efforts to expedite the regional implementation of sustainable development goals and targets. They have also made important contributions to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

51. In collaboration with the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and relevant regional and subregional organizations, the five regional commissions organized ministerial-level regional implementation meetings as inputs to the sixteenth session of the Commission. The regional implementation meeting for Africa was held in Addis Ababa in October 2007; the regional implementation meeting for Western Asia was held in Cairo in October 2007; the regional implementation meeting for Asia and the Pacific was held in Jakarta in November 2007; the regional implementation meeting for the Latin America and Caribbean was held in Santiago in November 2007; and the regional implementation meeting for Europe was held in Geneva in January 2008. The meetings focused on the regional specificities and regional cooperation regarding the Commission's thematic cluster: agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.[7] They provided very useful input to the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development by highlighting regional perspectives on progress made in implementing sustainable development goals related to the themes of the Session.

[7] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/rim.htm.

52. The regional commissions have continued to mainstream the subject of sustainable development into their work. The Economic Commission for Africa and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification signed a memorandum of understanding in March 2008 aimed at enhancing collaboration in implementing the Convention, notably in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification. It will be implemented within inter-agency coordination at the regional and subregional levels, including interaction with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank.

53. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia assisted countries in the region in formulating and adopting policies and measures and introducing mechanisms to improve sustainable resource use and management of energy and developed programmes for improving the energy sector sustainability for increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. The Commission also carried out a series of activities to enhance the capabilities of member countries in the implementation of integrated water resource management at national, local and regional levels, targeting stakeholders from the public and private sectors and civil society.

54. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and UNDP launched a regional report on Millennium Development Goals in April 2008, the third regional report on the Goals. The report highlights existing and potential challenges in achieving the Goals in Asia and the Pacific region, which is home to two thirds of the global poor. The report underscores the need for better coordination between international organizations in the region and countries wishing to achieve the Goals and for a regional road map that all development partners could use in those efforts.

55. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has created a network to disseminate successful experiences in achieving the Goals. Launched in June 2008, to date, it has recorded over 100 activities carried out by 48 governmental and non-governmental institutions in 17 Latin American countries. In order to present the most significant initiatives, seminars are held in South America, Central America and the Caribbean, where the programme results are evaluated and participants analyse the feasibility of implementing them in other countries. The project also includes the financing of internships so that professionals interested in replicating programmes may be able to see how they operate in person.

56. The Economic Commission for Europe continues its efforts towards improving the environment in the region through its five environmental conventions and their subsequent protocols. The environmental performance reviews of countries with economies in transition take into account progress towards the targets and goals set out in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to national environmental management. In addition, the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the "Environment for Europe", a pan-European political framework that brings together environment ministers and major stakeholders, was held in Belgrade in October 2007. The Conference addressed issues such as sustainable production and consumption patterns, sustainable energy policies, education for sustainable development and biological diversity.

VI. Major groups

57. The role of the major groups in sustainable development has grown and shifted in a number of significant ways since the World Summit on Sustainable Development. As timely progress in meeting sustainable development goals and targets becomes more urgent, major groups are succeeding in implementing innovative policies and programmes in partnership with Governments and others, and increasingly, their contributions to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development are anticipated as being informative and useful in providing a comprehensive review of where challenges and obstacles remain. Major groups are now in a position of increasing responsibility and leadership as partners in implementation activities, and their presence on Government delegations is also becoming more common, especially with regard to the youth sector.

58. As actors on the ground, representatives of major groups are making progress in implementing projects related to the thematic issues addressed in the Commission's multi-year programme of work, while simultaneously addressing cross-cutting issues such as poverty eradication, education, health and gender equality. They are called upon to share their practical experiences and field knowledge in the implementation of the commitments, goals and targets specific to the cycle's thematic cluster by submitting official discussion papers, background papers and case studies as input to the database and the matrix of informational tools developed by the Commission's secretariat.

59. The current focus of the Commission's cycle, agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa, has already elicited valuable contributions, complementary to the official reports, from specific sectors, including: the multi-stakeholder-driven sustainable agriculture and rural development initiative, whose progress is detailed in a background paper[8] as a successful partnership for sustainable agriculture and rural development; a background paper[9] produced by a consortium of non-governmental organizations active in Africa outlining obstacles and constraints to implementing sustainable development in the region; and a background paper prepared by indigenous peoples on the current thematic cluster.[10] The visibility and effectiveness of indigenous peoples' efforts to implement sustainable development principles has also been enhanced by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the General Assembly in 2007.[11]

60. It is clear that major groups must be fully engaged and included in decision-making processes to ensure the achievement of the sustainable development goals. To that end, the Commission renewed its effort at its sixteenth session to inspire practical and dynamic dialogue among different stakeholders by organizing an interactive dialogue among major groups, Governments and representatives of registered partnerships for sustainable development. It was the first time since the World Summit on Sustainable Development that major groups and representatives of partnerships for sustainable development conversed in a plenary meeting with Governments regarding their efforts to support implementation, and the rich

[8] See http://www.un.org/esa.sustdev/csd/csd16/documents/bp5_2008.pdf.

[9] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/documents/bp3_2008.pdf.

[10] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/mg/ipafrica.pdf.

[11] Resolution 61/295, annex.

exchange of views revealed the unique traits of partnerships while identifying key characteristics for their effective functioning on the ground and discussing the impediments to progress.

61. More broadly, substantive exchanges between representatives of major groups and Government officials are increasing, and are now integrated throughout the official review session, including through multi-stakeholder dialogues, interactive discussions and round tables within the high-level segment, and participation in thematic and regional discussions, including those related to island developing States. Experts from major groups also served as panellists in many of these discussions. More than 700 representatives, from 126 organizations, from 68 countries participated in the sixteenth session. The level of interaction was very high, with major groups making a total of 152 interventions, a record number for any meeting of the Commission. A number of obstacles and constraints were identified and experiences and lessons learned exchanged.

62. In preparation for the sixteenth session, major groups participated in the five regional implementation meetings organized by the regional commissions in order to promote effective consideration of regional and subregional inputs throughout the two-year cycle. Leading organizations held a number of additional regional and subregional intersessional meetings and strengthened the collaboration between the major groups by liaising with Governments of the region and coordinating their strategies.

63. Major groups were active in the Partnerships Fair, the Learning Centre and the many side events that took place during the sixteenth session. To complement the session's official programme of activities, a number of events were organized by major groups before and during the meeting, including: orientation meetings for all participating major groups; a "youth blast" for younger participants; and a series of weekend events entitled "City and farm linkages: food system tours and learning events in New York", through which the Commission organized tours of local farms and markets and provided a format for symposia and workshops open to both civil society and Governments.[12]

64. Supporting the participation of major groups in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development continues to be a challenge, particularly as major groups from developing countries and countries with economies in transition are expected to increase the level of their participation. Future success will depend on our collective ability to guide their sustained engagement and increase support for "process work", which would amplify the number and diversity of major groups that inform the Commission on Sustainable Development prior to and during its deliberations.

VII. Partnerships for sustainable development

65. Voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships working towards sustainable development goals have proved to be an important complementary outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and a viable implementation mechanism. As stressed at the World Summit, these partnerships are not a substitute for Government responsibilities and commitments; they are intended to strengthen

[12] See http://un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd16/mg/in_session.htm.

implementation by involving all those stakeholders who can make a contribution to sustainable development.

66. Partnerships have continued to develop and grow. There appears to be a wide acceptance that partnerships are now embedded in the international sustainable development dialogue and have become an integral part of the work of the United Nations system. By collaborating across all levels, pooling skills, and resources, developing innovative policy and technical and financing solutions to overcome barriers to sustainable development, such partnerships continue to demonstrate their impact, make concrete contributions to the implementation of internationally agreed sustainable development goals and commitments and deliver results on the ground. New partnerships are registered with the Commission secretariat. A majority of registered partnerships are operational, and have reported on progress made in pilot projects and activities. At the same time, many of these initiatives are evolving, taking on new partners and building alliances with other partnerships working in complementary areas.

67. Partnerships have proven to be a useful and credible vehicle for effecting change by catalysing Government action, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and creating new, innovative models for the implementation of sustainable development goals and commitments. As a dynamic implementation mechanism that has enriched the work of the Commission, they have become an important resource for relevant stakeholders, promoting their involvement in the work of the Commission. Their significant contribution is widely appreciated by participants.

68. As of July 2008, a total of 344 partnerships had voluntarily registered with the secretariat of the Commission, out of which 102 partnerships identified agriculture, drought, desertification, land, rural development and Africa as the primary focus of their activities. The thematic areas being addressed by registered partnerships cover a wide spectrum. More than half (53 per cent) of all registered partnerships are working in the broad area of protection and management of natural resources. More than one fifth of all registered partnerships are working in the areas of agriculture (28 per cent), biodiversity (27 per cent), climate change (28 per cent), energy (28 per cent), human settlements (22 per cent), rural development (23 per cent) and water (40 per cent).

69. In order to support the work of partnerships, the Commission's Partnerships for Sustainable Development website[13] and database[14] have been constantly improved and updated since their launch in February 2004. The website is to assist and facilitate the identification of partnerships' activities and their contributions by making available practical information ranging from details on how to register new partnerships with the Commission on Sustainable Development secretariat and information on upcoming partnerships-related meetings to recent publications on registered partnerships and detailed guidelines and programme of activities at the Partnerships Fairs organized by the Commission (see below). The database contains reports on the activities of the Partnerships voluntarily submitted by their focal points, which keep this database up to date and form the basis for summary reports prepared by the secretariat of the Commission.

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[13] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm.

[14] See http://esa.un.org/dsd/partnerships/public/.

70. At the Commission's sixteenth session, the secretariat organized a Partnerships Fair, as part of the official programme of work, in order to provide an opportunity for registered partnerships, particularly those focusing on agriculture, drought, desertification, land, rural development and Africa, as well as on small island developing States, water and sanitation, in order to showcase progress, network with existing and potential partners, create synergies between partnerships and learn from each other's experiences. The Partnerships Fair gave participants an opportunity to gather information on and discuss the important contribution of these initiatives to support the implementation of intergovernmentally agreed sustainable development goals and objectives. It highlighted on the ground experiences from partnerships practitioners working on issues related to the Commission's current implementation cycle (sixteenth and seventeenth sessions) as well as maximized opportunities to identify innovative solutions, effective strategies and emerging possibilities in implementing sustainable development goals and commitments.

71. The Partnerships Fair featured 5 interactive discussion sessions on "Partnerships in Practice", 15 presentations by registered partnerships, 2 training sessions and 18 information desks set up by individual partnerships. The report of the Secretary-General on partnerships for sustainable development (E/CN.17/2008/10) and a background paper with summaries of partnerships registered within the Commission's current implementation cycle were published for the session and served as valuable resources for discussion. Comprehensive and up-to-date information on trends in implementing sustainable development through partnerships was made available through *Partnerships Wire*, a newsletter highlighting discussions during the Fair, which was distributed through the Partnerships for Sustainable Development website.

72. There is increasing recognition that the international community may be entering a new phase of dialogue that requires further efforts to advance and mainstream the partnership-based approach to development. There is also a growing interest in building on the concrete added value that voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives bring to the process and in increasing efforts to further scale up and replicate partnership contributions and best practices.

73. Increasingly, a growing number of partnership stakeholders are expressing the need for the holding of a third international forum on partnerships for sustainable development, which would provide an opportunity to take stock and address challenges and opportunities relating to the use of partnerships, further facilitate knowledge-sharing on experiences, lessons learned and best practices and discuss emerging possibilities.

74. Lessons learned from the use of partnerships as a sustainable development implementation mechanism include: increased recognition of the contribution of local actors where partnership's effectiveness, impact and contribution are tested on the ground; increased effectiveness in development cooperation frameworks and enhancement of national sustainable development efforts as a number of Government partners have utilized partnerships as an innovative approach to increasing effectiveness in their development cooperation frameworks; and support for corporate social responsibility efforts since partnerships have proven to be a useful tool for the promotion and facilitation of corporate social responsibility efforts by private sector partners, which account for 38 per cent of the partners involved in those initiatives. Governments must continue to play an important role

in fostering partnerships as the complexity of the development challenges currently facing countries will continue to test the ability of Governments to muster the necessary resources and capacities to confront them.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

75. **Implementation of sustainable development principles, goals and policies is continuing at all levels, but the current food crisis, challenges in energy sector and climate change have demonstrated that taking an integrated and holistic approach, with an emphasis on interlinkages, ensuring broad participation in implementation, in particular by the stakeholders, and developing a practical focus on specific measures is essential in order to expedite implementation of sustainable development goals. Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups, including industry and business, should stay on this track while aiming for accelerated progress.**

76. **To that end, it is recommended that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Call on Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups to deepen their commitments to sustainable development by redoubling their efforts to implement Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, in particular by expediting progress in implementation by exchanging lessons learned and best practices;**

(b) **Call on Governments to continue providing their support to the Commission on Sustainable Development and to organize intersessional activities, taking into account the thematic cluster of issues considered by the Commission in 2008/2009 and to emphasize the importance of a consensus outcome and action-oriented policy sessions;**

(c) **Call on Governments to continue providing their support to the Commission on Sustainable Development and, in this regard, to contribute to the Commission's trust fund in support of enhanced participation of representatives of developing countries and representatives of major groups in the work of the Commission;**

(d) **Invite the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to continue monitoring, through its High-level Committee on Programmes, the operational efficiency and effectiveness of inter-agency collaborative mechanisms, including UN-Energy, UN-Water, UN-Oceans and other collaborative arrangements, in the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development;**

(e) **Call upon donor Governments and international financial institutions to target funding support to developing countries in support of their efforts to overcome barriers and constraints identified during the review year in the thematic cluster of issues of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.**